

[A Softer Light](#) by [Luddleston](#)

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Summary:

During his most successful escape attempt thus far, Anders makes it all the way to the village of Lothring, where he comes across a man who seems to understand what he's running from, and is taken in by the Hawke family.

When he finds out the family is full of apostates, he knows he can't stay, or he'll lead the Templars straight to them. But the way he's falling in love with Garrett Hawke is making it harder and harder for him to consider leaving him behind.

A Softer Light

Author's Note:

- For [miraculan](#).

Hello and welcome to Sweet Boy Hours! I just like thinking about how the Hawkes functioned as a family of apostates and how Malcolm would have trained his kids.

Plus a 15-year-old Anders is hilarious, he has way too many feelings and no idea what to do with them even as an adult, so he must have been a mess at 15.

THANK YOU to icky (@miraculan) for fact checking me on Dragon Age Backstory Stuff, inspiring me to replay this game, and blessing/cursing me with a new love for and appreciation of Anders. You should def go read their Handers fics which take place mid-canon and capture the spirit of these boys in a way I really love <3

This was his most successful escape attempt yet, and it was all thanks to a farmer's wagon passing by, loaded with enough hay to hide one little Anders.

Sure, he didn't know where he was going or how far he'd gone or if a pitchfork was going to stab into the hay pile at some point and skewer him, but he wasn't staring at the Circle Tower walls and nobody had hit him for hours, so he was perfectly content. Even with hay poking him literally all over his body and going up his nose if he wasn't careful, he was happy. It smelled nice, at least, earthy and fresh, not some moldy pile of wet grass that wasn't fit to feed animals.

Anders tried to keep a count of the time to measure how long it had been and figure out when he might be safe ducking out of the hay bale and hopping off the cart. He always had a head start on the Templars; they took a while to requisition his phylactery, get things up and running to track him (he assumed—he'd once tried to get at his own phylactery and it had been in

a sealed vault, so he imagined that was the reason for the usual delay). It was a matter of getting far enough away that they couldn't properly track him. And then a matter of *staying* far enough away.

The wagon rolled to a stop just after Anders lost count for the fourth time. His fear of pitchforks resurfacing, Anders figured this would probably be the best point at which to bid his ride farewell, so he hopped out before the driver could inspect his cargo. He shook hay out of his hair and his clothes as he scampered away behind the nearest building, which was, unsurprisingly, a barn.

There was hay in his *boots*, too, so he clambered up onto the fence that framed the paddock behind the barn, tipping each boot and shaking them. Distantly, he could hear the farmer unloading his wagon, but there was nobody in sight, only a few goats grazing the field.

He took a deep breath, and although the air smelled a bit like manure, it mostly smelled like *freedom*. A simple farming village looked like paradise when your life was contained in a tower.

There were apple trees lining the fence, and he darted over to them, picking three, one for each pocket and one to eat while he walked, approaching the larger cluster of buildings in the distance which looked like the town center.

Anders imagined he looked much like any young boy in this area, thanks to the clothes he'd managed to steal off the pile of belonging stripped from incoming mages. His robes, he'd realized after escape attempt number one, gave him away. Better to be in an ill-fitting, threadbare set of clothes that stank of somebody else's sweat than a floor-length robe emblazoned with the Circle's symbols, looking like an obvious apostate to everyone who walked by.

The walk into town lasted long enough that he finished all of the apples, tossing the cores one after another at the side of the road. There were wagons going past him and people leading horses and donkeys heavily laden with various goods—a market day, most likely. Good, those drew

crowds, and Anders would be glad to blend in. He might be less conspicuous once he stopped jumping at every sound.

His goals were clear: find a place to stay for the night, enough food to keep him going, and passage out of here. The eventual goal was somewhere North. Rivain, maybe, or Antiva. Even Tevinter, although Anders wasn't certain how well Tevinter would take to a Southern Circle mage loose in their territory.

Far enough, at least, he had to get far enough.

The market presented a good opportunity. Some of the traders had big wagons that would have traveled for miles. Based on the exotic decorations on their caravans and the goods they were selling, they looked (from Anders' limited knowledge) like they might be Northerners of some kind. Anybody who would go to the coast at some point would be good to tag along with, he just needed someone willing to take on a new volunteer without asking too many questions.

His thoughts were scattered by barking, loud enough that it was directed *at* him rather than being an ambient part of the Ferelden landscape. Sure enough, when he turned, there was an enormous powerhouse of a mabari thundering toward him, and he yelped, scrambling to get out of the beast's way.

He failed spectacularly, managing to trip over a stray cobblestone and land directly on his ass with a dog twice his size snuffling at him while he tried to squirm away. It took him a moment to realize the creature wasn't trying to attack him, just to lick him.

A voice cut through the happy dog snorting noises. "Hey, whoa! Hold off, let the poor boy up."

Blessedly, the dog's owner hauled the creature off Anders, who scrambled to his feet and considered running. He was stopped in his tracks by a firm hand clapping him on the shoulder.

"Are you alright, lad? Sorry about him." The man was tall, broad, with a farmer's thick, calloused hands, and he was giving Anders a crooked smile from behind a full, black beard with a light sprinkling of silver throughout.

"I'm fine," Anders said. "Thank you."

"I don't recognize you," he said, with a curious squint. His mabari still wanted at Anders, straining against the man's hold on its collar, trying to sniff him. "Are you with one of the traders who's just come into town?"

"I'm not from around here, no."

"Have you lost your group?" His head lifted, scanning the market at large. "I can help you get back to them."

Anders wished he was a cleverer liar, but any excuse he might have stuck in his chest and turned all to wind. "I... I..."

"You're alone, then?"

He nodded, looking at the ground beneath the man's feet. He could run, maybe even use force magic to shove the man away, but it was crowded enough that everybody would see and catch on to what he was doing.

"Far too young to be alone," he sighed. "But the world isn't always kind to young people. You're not hurt, are you?"

His knee was skinned raw from jumping out the window and landing badly, and his ass was bruised thanks to the over-eager hound, but he shrugged and said, "I'm fine. I just—"

The man reached toward him, and Anders couldn't help but flinch away. He was too close in build to one of the Templars. A broad, warrior-shaped person like him could hurt Anders too easily to let his guard down.

"Sorry. I shouldn't have reached for you without warning." The apology, like the fact that the man immediately dropped his hand, was unexpected. "What happened to your face?"

Usually, the templars were subtler in their abuses, in case of inspection by Templar higher-ups or Grand Enchanters or some shit, but sometimes, Anders got particularly smart-mouthed, and they just had to slap him across the face. The bruise was days old and fading, but his pale skin showed it. "I got myself into some trouble, that's all," he said.

"Hm." The man placed his hand on his hip. "Well, I'm something of a healer in these parts. I can't say I have the breadth of experience that the medicine women in town do, but I live about two miles that way—" he pointed, "—so any passers-through don't come by. If you'd like to, I'm sure my wife wouldn't mind one more for dinner, we have children about your—"

He stopped, head turning the same direction Anders' did, as they heard armored boots on the ground. It wasn't Templars, just a company of men in armor with heraldry Anders didn't recognize. They were soldiers of some kind, or maybe mercenaries, Anders wasn't sure how to distinguish. It had been enough to set his heart racing and his stomach sinking into his boots.

"Listen," the man said. "I know you're on the run from somebody, and you have no reason to believe I'm a safe person, but—here." He made a symbol with his hand, holding it flat up and down like a blade in front of his chest and then lowering it, a symbolic laying-down of weapons that one of the older mages in the Circle, who had once been like Anders and tried to make escapes, had shown him. It said, *'I am a friend of mages, and I'm not here to hurt you.'*

Anders was stunned for a moment, nothing but pure instinct bending him into the half-bow with eyes raised that was the response to that symbol. It was a gesture of acquiescence, but an acknowledgement that you still had your eyes open.

"Oh, thank the Maker, they still use that sign," he said. "I'm Malcolm Hawke. If you come with me, I can give you more information than that."

"Okay," Anders said, all his breath coming out of him with the word.

Offering that first bit of trust scared him more than anything he'd ever said aloud.

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Although Malcolm had pointed out the direction in which his home lay, they doubled back the other way toward a line of trees, one of which Malcolm hauled himself up into, coming back down with what he called his 'walking stick', which was definitely a staff.

"I'm getting too old to do that," he said, referring to the tree-climbing. "If I had my older boy with me, I'd make him clamber up there. He's about your age, I think."

Anders was fairly quiet for the length of the journey, which Malcolm was not perturbed by. He continued to chat as they went along, and Anders learned that he had three children, the others being a pair of twins younger than the son who was about Anders' age. What Malcolm had guessed Anders' age as, he didn't say. Hopefully he'd guessed high. Anders had planned on telling everybody he met that he was seventeen just to seem more adult, but he was afraid he barely passed for his actual fifteen years. He also learned that Malcolm loved to talk about his children and his wife, and also his dog, who was named, of all things, Potato.

The village, Anders learned, was called Lothering, and Malcolm was not originally from here, nor was his wife. She was from Kirkwall, in the Free Marches. He didn't say where he was from. Mages never did, if they were from the Circle. Anders wondered what tower.

Malcolm rarely asked questions of Anders, and when he did, he didn't expect answers. Anders confirmed very little about himself, except that he was from somewhere in Ferelden, but that his father was from the Anderfels, thus explaining his name. It was the most basic information he could provide about himself, and yet it still felt too much to provide a stranger.

Malcolm shared the water-skin in his pack and Anders was glad of it, as the walk was only two miles, but it was mostly uphill. Not a steep incline, but enough to make you thirsty. Potato seemed to have lost interest in sniffing Anders, and had probably been interested in him in the first place because

Anders smelled a bit like cat, as he'd made sure to give Mr. Wiggums a hug before he left. That cat was the only thing he'd miss about the Circle.

Eventually, as the sun moved directly overhead, they came to a farmhouse. It was kept very tidy, with window-boxes of flowers and a clean-swept front walk. It seemed like a nice place, glass window-panes and painted shutters, door hinges that didn't creak when you opened them.

"My elder son and my daughter are probably out at the barn," Malcolm said, giving a sharp whistle. "Potato! Go find Bethany and Garrett, bring them back here. Go on, boy!"

Potato ran off toward the barn behind the house, and Malcolm held the door so Anders could walk inside.

The main room of the house was centered around a wide hearth, where a big black cooking pot hung over a low fire. A long dining table was spread with a lot of different vegetables, and there was a boy sitting at the end of one of the long benches on either side of the table, a piece of paper in front of him and different colored oil pastels lined up in a neat row. He was younger than Anders, maybe about ten, with black hair combed neatly and a serious look on his face that was offset by the roundness of his cheeks.

"Hello, Carver," Malcolm ruffled the boy's hair, making him grumble. "Where's your mother? In the back garden?"

"Yeah," he said, focusing back in on his drawing.

"Alright. Carver, this is Anders, he's going to be joining us for dinner. He's from out of town, and he doesn't know anybody, so be nice. Make friends." With that order (Anders didn't think one could just be *instructed* to make friends, really) he walked through what looked like a storeroom or a workshop or both, and Anders heard another door open and close behind him.

"You're from out of town?" Carver lifted his head, frowning suspiciously at Anders.

"Yes," was all Anders could really say.

"So you haven't met my brother yet?"

"I've only met your father, and your dog," Anders said.

Carver gave him a decisive nod. "Then you should be my friend. Garrett always meets everybody first and so he gets all the friends."

Anders did not remark that one could have more than one friend, even among brothers, instead taking the seat across from Carver and peering at the picture he was making. "Are those horses?"

"They're dogs," Carver said. "I'm drawing what it would be like if everyone in my family had a mabari, and not just Father. This one is mine, she's the biggest one except for Potato, because I don't think there are any mabari as big as Potato. This one is Garrett's, it's the smallest because Garrett is already big so he doesn't need a big dog to look after him. His name is Potato the Second, because that's what Garrett said he'd name a mabari, because he isn't very good at names."

He picked up a reddish-orange pastel and colored something on top of one of the dogs' heads. "Is that one wearing a hat?" Anders asked.

"Yes, Bethany likes to put hats on Potato, so she can put hats on her mabari, too. I have to ask her what she wants to name it. And if she wants a boy one or a girl one. Mother has a girl one. She said she wanted it to be an Orlesian hound, but I don't know what those look like, so I just drew a mabari."

Anders, who also did not know what an Orlesian hound looked like, gave Carver an understanding nod.

Distantly, he could hear a conversation happening in the storeroom. One voice was Malcolm's, another was a woman's which he assumed to be Malcolm's wife. He could only hear snatches, mostly the woman's voice, as hers was higher and clearer than Malcolm's, which turned fuzzy in its depth.

"...sure that is quite safe?" They must have been talking about him. Taking in an apostate would be dangerous for anybody, but especially so for *another apostate*. Anders knew he was going to have to get out of here fast, because if he drew the Templars here and they captured him *and* Malcolm, a man who was living the free mage's life Anders so desperately desired, he'd never forgive himself.

Anders strained to catch more while Carver added a sword in the hand of the figure that was supposed to represent him, but any further attempts at eavesdropping were dashed when the door slammed open with abrupt action and Potato bounded in, followed by two more children.

The first through the door was a girl with her hair in pigtail braids, wearing a little red and blue dress that matched the ribbons tied in her hair. She was about the same size as Carver, and immediately crowded onto the bench next to him.

The other one caught Anders' attention, if only for how rarely he interacted with people his own age. The Templars, in order to curb romantic entanglements, tended to place mages with those of different age groups, and often restricted them to same-gender interactions (although that had never been an issue for Anders, who had always liked boys just as well as girls, maybe even more).

This boy, who must have been the aforementioned Garrett, was tall, but not in the gangly, awkward way Anders was. Like Carver and their sister, he had dark hair, but his was a messy mop that managed to look deliberate anyway, curling at the edges where it was getting a bit long. He wore his sleeves and his trousers rolled up to combat the heat, his shirt unbuttoned all the way to his belly to show off tanned, freckled skin.

"Hi," he said, Malcolm's crooked smile on his face. "Did we sprout a new brother while we were out?"

"No," said Carver, fighting to keep his drawing out of his sister's grasp, "he's my friend. *My* friend, Garrett, you can't steal him!"

This last bit was said in a particularly plaintive whine, because Garrett plopped himself onto the bench beside Anders, straddling it like a horse instead of treating it like an actual seat, leaning forward onto his hands and peering at Anders. "Are you from the village? I don't recognize you, are you new?"

"I'm from out of town," Anders said.

"Father brought him home. And he's the *only person you didn't meet first and STEAL!*"

"It's not stealing if somebody wants to be friends," Garrett told him, his foot swinging under the table to bump Carver's. "And you can have more than one friend. And he's closer to my age than yours, right? How old are you? What's your name?"

"Anders. Fifteen." He answered the questions out of order and forgot to lie about his age.

"See? Same age," Garrett said, making Anders very glad he'd not lied. "What are you drawing? Horses?"

"They're *dogs*."

"Don't pout, Carver." Garrett fixed the line of his pastels, which had been disturbed when they sat down. "You have Bethany. A twin is like a built-in best friend."

Bethany put her arms around Carver. "Yeah, don't pout, I'm the best."

Carver continued to pout.

Garrett leaned on the table and looked at Anders, his head cocked to the side as he watched him. "Do you have siblings?"

If his parents had more children after he'd gone to the circle, he might have siblings, but he wasn't sure. He shook his head.

"Lucky you," Garrett said, poking him in the elbow. "Are you staying for supper?"

Anders, who was hungrier than he cared to admit, said, "Maker, I hope so," which made Garrett laugh.

Garrett told Bethany and Carver to go play with Potato, and said he'd call on them to feed the chickens later. Malcolm and Mrs. Hawke finished their discussion-slash-argument and emerged from the side room, and Anders was finally introduced to the lady of the house, who was named Leandra, and who was a kind, if weary-looking woman (he could imagine, with the three Hawke children to look after). She seemed to warm to Anders after he offered to help prepare supper, and she poured all of them cups of strong, black tea with honey, which smelled incredible even if it was too hot for this weather.

Leandra picked up a basket of laundry, asked Garrett to show Anders what they needed to prepare for dinner later, and left the house. Distantly, Anders could hear her calling to Bethany and Carver, telling them to stop digging holes by the front walk before somebody tripped and sprained something.

Malcolm looked between Anders and Garrett and said, "I'll be in the barn, mixing up a few remedies for folks in town. Garrett, after dinner tonight, you can show Anders the workroom."

Garrett dropped the cutting board he'd been holding onto the table with a clatter. "*What?* You said we're never allowed to take friends in there."

Malcolm nodded. "I know, but you can take him."

Anders did not understand the significance of this, but Garrett's eyes were wide. He supposed he'd figure it out when they went to the workroom, but for now, he watched Malcolm step out of the room, staff in hand.

Garrett stopped staring after his father's retreating back, and looked at Anders instead. "Are you hungry?" he asked. "I'm hungry."

He cut them slices of bread and cheese to eat while they prepared the vegetables for supper (eating *while* you cooked was a novelty for Anders) and set a basket of fresh blackberries on the table between them to snack on.

"We picked those this morning," he said of the berries, tossing one into the air and catching it in his mouth. "D'you want me to cool off your tea?"

"What? I was just going to wait for it to stop steaming."

Garrett leaned across the table. "If Father doesn't care about me showing you the workshop, I'm assuming he won't mind this," he said, and then he wiggled his fingers, a blue cloud of frost collecting in his palm. When he pulled his hand back, the tea was cold as melted snow, such a refreshment from the hot summer air that Anders sighed in relief.

Then realized what Garrett had done and nearly spit out his mouthful of tea.

"You're a *mage*," he said.

"Surprise?" Garrett said. "Yeah. Dad passed it on to me. Sorry, didn't mean to startle you with it."

"No, no, I—" Anders desperately looked for some way to express that his astonishment was at their solidarity, not their differences. The easiest way would be to return the favor, but Garrett was already repeating the spell over his own mug, and frost magic wasn't Anders' specialty.

In his hand, he gathered threads of Fade energy, of life and growth and creation, the sort that, if he brought it fully to bear, could heal a small cut or minor ill. It manifested as a soft green glow in his palm for just a moment, and then he let it loose.

Garrett's eyes lit up, his grin spreading from one ear to the other. He slammed both palms on the table, rattling their cups. "Amazing!" he said, even thought it was the tiniest possible display of magic. "I've never met

another mage before. Except for my dad. And we think the twins might be, but I didn't start doing magic until I was thirteen."

"I was twelve," Anders said, going a little sad over it. "I'm glad you had your father here." What he wouldn't have given for someone as smiling, gentle, and protective as Malcolm Hawke to teach him magic, rather than Circle mages and Templars ready to hound a single misstep.

"Do you know how to do fire? Father won't teach me fire yet," Garrett said.

"I know how to do fire," Anders said. "But I can't do it in the house."

"*Awesome*. We'll go out to the field sometime and you're gonna show me how to set stuff on fire." Garrett pointed a carrot at him, which wasn't very intimidating. "Now. Do you wanna peel stuff, or chop stuff?"

Anders chose chopping stuff, which had been a good choice, because he had time to snack on more berries while Garrett tried to get every potato peel off in one piece and wasted a lot of time doing it.

"You're good at this," Garrett said after a while. Anders wasn't sure what he meant in specific, the knife work was no enormous effort.

"What?"

"You don't even cry when you cut the onions."

"Oh. I'm just used to it, that's all," Anders said. "We cook all our own meals at—" *the Circle? Home?* It certainly wasn't home. "Where I'm from."

Garrett must have read between those particular lines, because he dropped his peeling into the bag they were collecting for chicken feed, and set down his knife. "Are you an apostate?" he asked. "My father is. And technically, so am I."

"I am now," Anders said.

"Are you going to stay here? Father says Lothering is a good place to be nobody."

Anders looked down at his work, trying to keep his slices of carrot even. "I can't," he said. "The Templars can track me. I'm going to be on the run until they forget about me."

Garrett rolled a potato back and forth between his hands. "By yourself?" he asked.

"Yeah."

"You shouldn't be."

"I have to be."

Garrett didn't argue with that.

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Dinner with the Hawkes was a wild affair, very different to what Anders was used to. Leandra had taken all the vegetables they'd prepped and spent the afternoon simmering them into a delicious stew, which they had with more of the bread they'd eaten for lunch that day. More than once, somebody asked for a bread roll and Garrett just threw it in their direction instead of passing it politely. Leandra scolded him, but it didn't keep him from doing it again.

It was clear that, while not as dirt-poor as Anders' family had been growing up, the Hawkes were not wealthy, and Anders appreciated that they would share with a complete stranger, rather than expecting him to take care of himself.

When he expressed as much, Leandra almost looked teary. She squeezed his shoulder and said, "you shouldn't be expected to take care of yourself. You're only a boy. It's how I'd want somebody to treat my babies if they were lost like you. Now, if you help wash up, you'll have more than earned your keep."

He did do the washing up, and was joined by Garrett, who was teased mercilessly by his siblings for it, because apparently this chore usually fell

to the twins, and Garrett was only doing it because he wanted to spend time with Anders.

("Garrett only wants to hang out with his *new best frieeend*," Bethany crowed.

"His best friend who he *stole*!" Carver added.)

As Anders was drying the last of the dishes, Garrett reached out and snagged his sleeve, a simple action that still made Anders freeze up. He would have dropped the bowl he was holding, but Garrett snatched it before it could tumble, setting it on the drying rack with a quick, "sorry. Leave that, c'mon, I wanna show you the workroom."

He let Garrett pull him out the back door by his elbow, and the two of them crossed the field to the barn that stood a short distance from the house.

The barn itself was unremarkable, although Anders peeked at all of the animals (a mule, several goats, and some pigs) as Garrett pulled him insistently toward the back. Though the day had been hot, the evening air had cooled, and Garrett's hand on Anders' arm was a spot of heat through the chill.

He led Anders to an area that looked like it was used mostly for storage, and then pulled aside a canvas tarp to reveal a cellar door with a metal handle, which he yanked up and heaved open.

"Watch your step," he said, ushering Anders to go down the ladder first.

Anders wasn't sure what he expected—some sort of cellar maybe, like the basement floor of Kinloch, where the wet and mold and rot always got in. It wasn't like that, he realized straight away. Drier, for one.

The air was stale, but it smelled like the potion-master's workshop at the tower. There was the rich scent of herbs and the sharp astringency of medicinals, all overlaid by a sweet tang that was almost like the scent Anders associated with storm magic. It was *lyrium*, Anders realized, must have been, because there were rows of bottles of blue, faintly glowing

liquid on shelves along the far wall. They were labeled with their concentrations in a neat but blocky hand, all of them far lower doses than you'd see at the Circle. Anders had never tasted lyrium, for he had not been harrowed.

Lyrium wasn't the only thing stored down here: there were shelves laden with books and various artifacts, like a cluttered, miniature version of the organized magical archive at Kinloch. It was much more pleasing to the eye to see things looking decorative instead of being kept in glass lockboxes, with dedicated clerks to decide who was allowed to handle them. Garrett picked up what looked like a bejeweled bird skull and turned it back and forth in his hands as he asked, "so, what do you think of the place?"

Anders, who had been so focused on the shelves he'd missed the rest of the room, turned to take it all in. In the center of the room was a long worktable, swept clean, with a row of potion bottles at the end, each labeled not with their contents, but with names. Malcolm had mentioned being a healer, and these must have been remedies, each customized to their intended recipient. In one corner, there was a bed laid out, with folded blankets and squashy pillows, slightly elevated as if for a patient, and in another, there were three staves leaned against the wall like they really were simple walking sticks.

Anders didn't have a staff, either. He used the training ones at practice, but they were straight, neat rods with hardly a whiff of magic running through. Like wooden practice swords to a real blade, he imagined.

"It's incredible," he said, "truly. I wish I knew a place like this. Can I read all these books? Any of them?"

"Yeah," Garrett said, setting down the bird skull and going to the shelf. "This is the one I'm working on, come here."

He sat on the edge of the bed, and Anders followed, standing beside him, only for Garrett to pat the mattress.

"Come on, it's fine. I sleep in here all the time, beats sharing a room with the twins. Carver talks in his sleep and Bethany will climb into your bed

and snuggle you even when it's too hot." He opened the book, thumbing through it. "Besides, if I stay in here late, I'll wake them up when I get back."

It was the proximity that was making him hesitate, the strangeness that came with realizing that he never sat close to somebody like this. The other mages weren't very friendly to him, after Anders' misbehavior got the whole lot of them punished on more than one occasion.

Anders hopped up and peered over Garrett's shoulder. The book was an older edition of the first-year textbooks the Circle used, which meant Anders already knew everything that was in it. The interesting bit wasn't the book, it was the notes in the margins, in a similar hand to the labels on the potions and the lyrium. This book had belonged to a younger Malcolm Hawke, and he had annotated it heavily with revisions to certain spells, observations he'd made that went against what the textbook claimed, and connections the text didn't make.

Anders, who found that studying this dry text made him feel antsy and restless and constantly frustrated or exhausted, was actually *interested* in Malcolm's notes. Malcolm put things together in a way that felt cohesive, explained himself in his notes, and often doodled illustrations to make his point. Anders could tell that Malcolm had been as fascinated and obsessed with magic as Anders was with escaping the tower, and his fixation was contagious.

They sat that way for a long time, with the book's front cover on Garrett's lap and its back cover on Anders', turning the pages whenever Anders finished with the notes and Garrett finished pointing out all the amusing anecdotes he could think of to accompany that page's contents.

"When I was learning this one," he said, on a page about force magic, "I ended up *launching* myself into the air. Dad had to catch me."

Anders laughed just picturing it, which only encouraged Garrett to go on.

"No, seriously, I looked like—" he mimicked his facial expression during that particular event, arms flailing and all. "I would've cracked my head

open if I actually hit the ground." He dropped his hands out of the air, putting one arm around Anders' shoulder.

Anders wished Garrett hadn't noticed when he flinched.

"Sorry," he said, trying to pull his hand away.

"No!" Anders said, setting his hand over Garrett's and keeping it there before he could. "Sorry. I'm just not used to—usually, when people reach out to me or touch me or something without warning, it's not a good thing."

Garrett's arm over Anders' shoulder relaxed, and he leaned in, putting his head on Anders' other shoulder. "I'm sorry," he said, completing a full trio of apologies. "You don't deserve to be treated that way."

Anders, who had spent so often hearing so many people—mages and Templars alike—tell him he *did* deserve to be treated that way, that he *earned* his punishments, couldn't help but feel as if Garrett was pressing on all the cracked pieces of his heart that had broken years ago, trying to fuse them back together.

Anders found himself shaking, and he lifted his hands from the book so he didn't wrinkle the pages. He reached out and put his hands on Garrett's sides, feeling his ribcage move as he breathed, unsteady, like *he* might be crying for Anders' sake. And then, because Anders couldn't help himself, he just put his arms around Garrett, holding him tight in a way he could only remember ever hugging his mother, his face pressed into Garrett's neck, his heart pounding against Garrett's chest.

It should have been a sad thing, the realization that he'd made somebody cry over him, because he was just that pitiful, but there was a wriggling sense of *glee* inside of Anders, an overwhelming happiness as he satisfied a longing for closeness he didn't even know he'd had. It had only been three years since he'd been sent to the Circle, but that long without another person being soft with him, not even once, felt like a lifetime.

When Garrett pulled away, he was wiping his eyes with the heel of his hand.

"I didn't mean to upset you," Anders said.

"Maker, no. *You* didn't upset me. Don't worry." Garrett rubbed his back, then sort of patted him. He was the kind of person who expressed what he thought by touching you, Anders realized, poking to get your attention, softer when he just wanted you to know he was there. "We ought to get some rest, though. I stay up too late reading, Mother says it's going to ruin my eyes even though it's all mage-light down here."

There wasn't even a question as to whether or not Anders was going to share his bed. Garrett kicked off his shoes, got in, and immediately held out the covers so Anders could climb under. This, too, he was unfamiliar with. Apprentice mages slept in narrow beds hardly wider than Anders' shoulders, all piled into bunkrooms. The idea of a bed large enough to fit another person in with him was something he only remembered from childhood, tucked between his parents.

Garrett turned onto his side, facing away from Anders, and with a lazy wave of his hand, all the mage-lights went out.

— — —

Garrett had complained about Bethany sleep-cuddling, but apparently she was not the only Hawke prone to such behaviors, because Anders woke up with Garrett wrapped around him like a particularly warm, soft octopus. A warm, soft octopus with only two arms, one of which was under Anders' head, and the other of which was around his chest, like Garrett might still be trying to keep Anders' heart intact.

So, not like an octopus at all, just like a boy. A boy whose legs were tangled with Anders' and whose breath was tickling the hair at the back of Anders' neck.

Anders was usually cold when he woke up. He always ran cold, and they didn't give you thick enough blankets, because they figured mages should be able to warm themselves with magic. Anders had never believed in this self-heating mage bullshit until Garrett, who was practically a human

furnace, cuddled up to him and proved that maybe some mages ran hot enough to keep themselves warm all night.

He could tell when Garrett woke up, because he squeezed Anders a little tighter and made these soft, terribly cute lip-smacking noises. "Morning," he said, releasing Anders. The room was dark, but Anders was used to waking in a room with all the shutters closed.

"Morning," Anders replied.

Garrett flicked all the lights back on and Anders groaned, squeezing his eyes shut and burying his face into the pillow.

"You sleep okay?" Garrett asked. His voice was all rough and cracked from sleep. Anders' heart decided it was done with the metaphors of being like a broken stone, and it'd rather be a feathered thing, fluttering into his throat.

"Fine, yeah," he said. Actually, he'd slept better than he could remember.

"The one problem about sleeping down here is I've got no idea what time it is when I get up. Hope we didn't miss breakfast," Garrett said, climbing over Anders to get out of bed, which made Anders' brain erupt into sparks and his hands clutch the blankets.

"Me too," Anders said. "I'd like to get breakfast before I go. Think your mother will keep feeding me if I keep doing the dishes?"

"Anders—" Garrett gasped, affronted. "You can't leave *already*. You just got here!"

He had to, though. It was dangerous enough to stay the one night. The Templars sure wouldn't stop for the evening, at least not long enough to really bunk down and get cozy. They were probably on his trail already, and the Hawke family home was remote, but it wasn't remote enough. Sooner or later, someone in town would mention the house a few miles away, and the Templars would find him.

"I'm leaving after breakfast," he said, firmly. "I'll not put your family in any more danger just for being around me."

"If you must," Garrett said.

He must.

— — —

Breakfast was the same sort of noisy affair dinner had been; apparently the Hawke family was rambunctious all hours of the day. This time, Potato was in the house, because the sky had been cloudy while they walked over and got rainy before they started to eat. By the time the meal was over, the rain was pouring in sheets, and thunder rolled overhead, bursts of lightning arcing through the sky.

Anders tried to thank them for their hospitality and go, but Malcolm and Leandra wouldn't hear of it.

"In this storm? Heavens, no. It's far too dangerous," Leandra said, her hands set on her hips with unarguable finality.

"Besides, who's going to come slogging up that hill to us in this weather just to look for you?" Malcolm said, understanding Anders' flightiness a little more clearly.

Because the storm refused to break, Anders remained at the Hawke household for the rest of the morning and on into the afternoon. He presumed it was afternoon, at least; one couldn't see the sun for all the clouds, and Malcolm had closed the shutters anyhow. It was calmer that day, but not necessarily quieter.

Leandra was reading the twins a book in their bedroom, which often prompted breaks to reenact the story, which was about a wizard and a princess (Carver was playing the part of the wizard and Bethany was the princess). Malcolm had been the only one to brave the storm, leaving for his workshop so that he could finish a few tonics for folks in the village he

would see as soon as the weather broke. He'd taken Potato with him, but hadn't let Anders and Garrett come along.

Instead, Anders and Garrett stole away to the side room in the house, where there was an enormous squashy armchair next to a basket full of clothes that needed to be mended. The chair was big enough that both of them could fit into it, pressed even closer than they had been on the bed.

Garrett had pulled out a little notebook, and he was explaining to Anders the code that his father had taught him, so that Anders might be able to read Malcolm's grimoire.

Garrett was right-handed and Anders was sitting on his right, so when he scribbled on the page (his handwriting much messier than Malcolm's) his arm bumped into Anders'.

"You know how else this might come in handy?" Garrett asked, nudging his elbow against Anders' on purpose this time. "You could send me letters in code, and then you could say anything you want, and nobody would be able to read it but me."

Anders had never been good at keeping his feelings off his face, and he sure as hell wasn't hiding a blush. "What exactly would I say?" he asked, swaying a little closer to Garrett. "What secret things am I writing you?"

"Stuff about magic," Garrett said, "of course."

"Of course." Anders cleared his throat. "I'm not sure how I'd even get a letter to you, anyway."

"Are you going to be that far away?" Garrett's voice was softer than usual, a bit of his gregariousness dampened.

Anders nodded. "I'm going all the way to Antiva. Or maybe Rivain. Somewhere the Ferelden Templars can't chase me."

Garrett picked at the corner of the page, driving his thumbnail against the edge of the thick cream paper and making it split. "Listen, Anders—I've

been thinking. I'd like to come with you."

"*What?*" Anders whispered, because it was either that or shouting. "No. No, you *can't*."

"You shouldn't be by yourself! And I'm grown enough to take care of myself. I have my own stuff. I know how to use lyrium responsibly. I can't set things on fire, but you can—"

"Garret, *listen to me*." Anders took his shoulders, giving him a little shake. "You've got a perfect life here. Your parents love you, your father has so much more to teach you, and you have your little siblings to look after. You can't give that up for somebody you've known for a day."

Garrett frowned, crumpling forward, putting his head on Anders' shoulder again. "But what if I *like* that somebody I've known for a day, what if I feel closer to him than my family, because he knows what it's like, and he wants... he wants what I do."

Anders doubted that last bit. All he'd ever wanted was his freedom, and Garrett had always had that. He didn't know how lucky he was. "And what is it that you want, Garrett?"

"More time with you."

Anders breathed slow, trying not to burst into tears or scream, ripped through by the raw, terrifying reality that he *could not have this*. He'd never be able to have this.

"I'll stay another night," Anders said. "You can't leave without telling your parents, I won't let you do that. We can talk to them in the morning." The lie felt bitter in his mouth.

"Okay," Garrett said. "Yeah, that sounds good."

"In the morning," Anders repeated.

He'd be gone by then.

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After Malcolm and Potato returned waterlogged and muddy, Garrett got roped into helping Malcolm give the dog a bath. Leandra tugged Anders away and asked for his help making dinner instead, and Anders was glad both to get away from the wet-dog smell and to get a chance to speak with her.

"I don't know how to say this," he said, "but your son told me he intends to run away with me when I leave."

Her look of shock prompted him to continue.

"I'm not going to let him! I want to make sure I... get out of here before he catches me." He dropped his head, looking at the wood grain of the kitchen table. "I ran away from the Circle, Mrs. Hawke. I don't know if your husband told you that. And this isn't the first time I've done it. They're going to... they're going to catch me again."

She pressed her hand over her mouth, shaking her head. "Oh, you poor thing—Malcolm said, but I didn't realize."

"I'm okay, I just don't want him to be in the same boat I am."

She sat at the table across from him, taking his hands in hers. He noticed she wore a ring, a piece of jewelry that was far more elegant and beautiful than he expected a farmer's wife to wear, made of pure gold with a blue stone. "You know, Malcolm left the circle to marry me," she said. "I don't like to think—and I don't ever *ask*— what he did to get rid of his phylactery and keep them from chasing him. All he wanted to do was keep the three of us safe."

The three of us. Garrett must have already been in the picture, then. "I'm going to get mine someday," Anders said. "Smash the bloody thing. Or else I'll get so far away, they can't chase me."

"If you ever do, come back to Lothering," she said. "Garrett will be upset, but he'll understand, and I know he'll want to see you again."

He knew he wore doubt in the creases between his brows. But he said, "just promise me someone will make sure he doesn't come with me. The Circle's nowhere for somebody like him, I can't allow them to have him."

"You're a good boy, Anders," Leandra said, although he was quite sure that wasn't true.

— — —

The storm lightened, but Malcolm hadn't been kidding about the road up to the Hawke homestead. The downpour had turned it into a mudslide, and there was no way anybody was trudging up that to get to Anders, especially not in heavy armor. He relished the mental picture of Templars slipping down it and all ending up in a heap of mud.

Wanting to soak up all he could of Malcolm's knowledge but not wanting to bother Malcolm himself, Anders went back to the barn once the storm had gone, and Garrett went with him. Tonight, he was struggling through the coded grimoire, and Garrett lay on the bed beside him, his head resting against Anders' thigh. He was half-asleep, and said the rain made him feel tired, but it was probably the fault of how late they'd stayed up last night. Dealing with a wiggling, muddy mabari and then a dinner that was just as chaotic as the one previous probably hadn't helped.

When Anders couldn't understand a line of text, he propped the book on Garrett's chest and asked him to translate. Eventually, as Garrett grew wearier, Anders felt worse about doing that.

He stumbled across a part of the code he didn't recognize, but instead of prodding Garrett awake, Anders just watched for a moment. Garrett had slipped into a doze, his face slack, breath coming through a slightly-parted mouth. He had freckles all over his cheeks and his nose, even his forehead, and there was a bit of a shadow of darker hair coming in on his upper lip. Of all his features, his eyelashes stood out in particular, dark and thick, balancing out unruly brows. The light made all the shadows on his face fuzzy, blurring him like an artist's first pass at a painting, before all the details were refined.

Anders understood mage-light to be something cold and utilitarian, but the light in the workshop was warm, soft in a way that Anders didn't know it could be. Soft like Garrett's hair curling against his thigh. Soft like the pink curve of Garrett's mouth.

Anders set the book aside.

If he was gentle enough, Garrett probably wouldn't wake, right?

He brushed his knuckles down Garrett's cheek, tracing the curve of it. Garrett was almost as lanky as Anders, but he still had some of the roundness in his face that was more obvious on his younger siblings and his mother. Anders traced the strong, straight bridge of his nose with a fingertip, smoothed over his brow, brushed his hair off his forehead.

He leaned in closer, until he could feel Garrett's breath against his ear. What he *really* wanted to do would take more daring than he possessed, so he pressed a kiss, even gentler than the touch of his fingers, to Garrett's forehead.

Garrett's voice was so quiet Anders might have imagined it. "My lips are down here."

But no, he wasn't imagining it, because he could see the smile those lips were curved into, could hear it reflected in Garrett's voice. "Are you... sure?"

His eyes opened, the warmest brown Anders had ever seen, like a puppy's eyes. "Anders, do you want to kiss me?"

It was as if all Anders' past desires never happened. Had he ever *wanted*? No, not the way he wanted Garrett Hawke. "More than anything."

"Then kiss me," Garrett said.

"I don't know how," Anders confessed. "I never have."

He watched those brown eyes dart back and forth, looking between Anders' eyes and his mouth. "Neither have I."

"Can I try?"

"I want you to."

Anders settled his fingertips on Garrett's cheek, his index finger at the corner of Garrett's mouth so that when he closed his eyes, he wouldn't lose track of where Garrett's mouth was. Garrett still lay perpendicular to Anders, which prevented any worries of accidentally smashing noses. Anders was glad, because that idea had always concerned him when he had reason to think of kissing, and both he and Garrett had rather prominent noses.

Garrett's eyes closed before Anders' did, as he settled himself in and waited for it, which Anders appreciated, because he couldn't possibly look as handsome up close as Garrett did.

He started with a curious peck, like the sort of kiss he'd place on Mr. Wiggums' head, or the kind his mother had given him when he was a child. He might have left it at that, except that Garrett's breath hitched a little, and that tiny noise of obvious excitement made Anders want to keep going, give him more.

The second kiss lasted longer, and during it, Anders became very aware of how his lips were always a bit dry and chapped, and he tried to pull away to wet them, but he was close enough that he sort of licked Garrett's mouth during.

This was not a bad thing, apparently. Garrett put a hand on the back of Anders' head, holding him still as he pressed their mouths together again, a sloppier crush than the first two had been. There was a sucking sound that Anders was sure was absolutely terrible when they parted, but when he opened his eyes, Garrett was looking at him with a soft, starry-eyed expression.

Garrett sat up so fast, he nearly cracked his face into Anders', shifting around so that they were side-by-side and then he cupped Anders' face in his hands and kissed him again, and again, and again.

Neither of them were sure of what they were doing, but both of them were just trying to feel good, and *Maker*, was it good. Anders hugged Garrett close to him, until his chest was pressed against Garrett's and he was practically climbing into Garrett's lap, and Garrett kept combing his fingers through Anders' hair and making sweet little sounds against his mouth.

Anders knew which one of them was going to break this kiss, and it wasn't going to be him. This was going to be his first and last of Garrett Hawke; he wasn't eager to give that up.

There was a warmth running through him, like an electrical current, like his magic had all been brought to the surface at once. Garrett was warm, and Anders was warming to meet him.

When Garrett pulled away, and both of them opened their eyes, the room was full of dancing motes of mage-light. It was not the warm golden light Malcolm and Garrett set to illuminate the workroom, but little blue sparkles that Anders knew were his doing.

Garrett smiled when he saw them, and smiled wider when he saw Anders. "They're like fireflies," he said.

Anders, who didn't spend a lot of time out of doors, wasn't sure. "I suppose they are."

"My father makes butterflies like this for my mother sometimes," Garrett said. "Little blue ones, just like this. I've always wanted somebody to do that for me—I think I like the fireflies even better."

"I didn't actually intend to..." Anders trailed off, staring at the dancing lights. He'd never quite lost track of his magic like this, not since he was first learning, and never from pleasure and happiness.

They were already fading, but Garrett reached out to catch one in his hand. "Oh! They're hot," he said, shaking his hand out, the light having disappeared inside his palm.

"Let me see that," Anders said, reaching for his hand. In the center, there was a red mark of a fresh burn, just over the center line of his palm. It likely wouldn't hurt for more than a day and it wasn't the sort of thing you usually wasted mana on, but Anders drew healing magic out of himself anyway, directing it not to his hands, but to his mouth. He pulled Garrett's hand over and kissed the mark there, the irritation fading from Garrett's skin as Anders' magic seeped in.

He wasn't going to leave Garrett with a mark on him. Nothing to remind him.

"That was..." Garrett said into the silence they'd lapsed into. "That was incredible, Anders. Not the healing, I mean, although that was good as well, thank you for that. I mean... I've never felt more *right* than I do while I'm kissing you."

"Me too," Anders admitted.

Garrett leaned in as if to kiss him again, and Anders clasped his shoulders, pulling him to a stop. "What's wrong?" Garrett asked.

"I just think maybe we should get some rest—you were falling asleep before I, you know. Woke you."

"Not falling asleep now," Garrett said. "I don't think I've ever been so awake, Anders. I want to keep kissing you until the sun comes up. And we can't tell when the sun comes up down here, so I'll have to keep kissing you forever."

Anders had a sudden urge to plaster his hands over his own face and hide. It was Garrett's earnestness that flustered him, sweet and open and honest enough to make Anders' own duplicity (which was a white lie, really, things would be *better* for Garrett once Anders left) feel like the worst sort of sin. "Garrett, shouldn't we...?"

What was it he wanted to say?

Shouldn't we take things slow? We'll have time for that later?

Except that was a lie, that was even more of a lie than, *"I'll say 'til morning and we'll talk to your parents about this before you leave."* Anders was finding that each time he lied to Garrett Hawke, it became more difficult and it made him feel worse.

And here Garrett was, looking at him wide-eyed, waiting for the end of a sentence that was twisting itself up in Anders' throat. "Shouldn't we talk about this first?"

"I like you. A lot, I really—" Garrett sighed, looking into the distance over Anders' shoulder, which was better, but then looking directly and fervently into his eyes, which was worse. "I really like you, and I like kissing you, and I don't want to stop, but if you do, we can stop."

"I don't," Anders said, that last shred of honesty escaping his lips before he could stop it. "I don't want to stop."

They didn't. Not when Garrett kissed him, not when Garrett touched him, not when Garrett pressed so hard against him Anders fell flat onto his back, and Garrett climbed on top of him and then kissed him again. Anders began to understand why Circle mages would risk the harshest punishments the Templars had to offer all for the sake of love and making love.

Garrett kissed him until his lips were sore, but it didn't stop him. Anders tried repeating what he saw when he'd come across two of the older apprentices stealing away in a dark corner, tucking his face into Garrett's neck and kissing him there. Garrett said, *"oh, that feels good, love,"* and Anders almost cried just hearing Garrett call him something sweet.

It went on longer than it should have. Anders put his hands on Garrett more than he should have. Garrett returned each touch in kind, and when they pressed together as close as they could, Anders felt a spark, an ignition in his magic that he never had before. It was as if Garrett's magic called out to his, like their souls were intertwining just as much as their bodies were.

Anders thought, as they finally wore themselves out enough that they slept, he would never feel anything like this again.

— — —

The Maker must have smiled upon him, because Anders woke before Garrett, and he didn't manage to disturb him as he slipped out of bed, climbed the ladder, and went back to the farmhouse.

Now that the storm had passed, the weather was beautiful, a pale dawn that was going to lead to a clear sky. Anders might have preferred some more rain to slow down the Templars, but he'd take what he could get.

Malcolm and Leandra sent him off with a bag full of food, a few potions tucked in between where the glass wouldn't break, a traveling cloak which belonged to Malcolm himself at one point, and a *staff*. Simple wood, nondescript, but it would get the job done, so Malcolm said.

They embraced him as he left, wished him well, and he didn't cry until he was all the way down the front walk.

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Part of Anders wished Garrett would come running after him. He checked over his shoulder for him all day. But mostly, he was glad that he'd kept this boy safe. He'd have given anything. He didn't think he'd ever stop missing Garrett, but he also didn't feel he'd made the wrong decision.

He was especially glad of this choice when, not two days down the road, he was caught by Templars and hauled back to Kinloch.

But the Hawkes were safe.

— Eleven Years Later —

It was only natural that a group of heavily-armed people entering Anders' clinic would get his hackles' up and would get Justice's hackles up, besides. He shook his head just enough to keep Justice's telltale glow out of his eyes and turned, staff raised, ready to tell them off but halting mid-sentence.

The man standing before him looked so much like a kind mage who'd once picked him up off the side of the road, Anders felt like he'd been slapped

across the face.

It couldn't be Malcolm Hawke. He was too young, no silver in his beard.

"Garrett?" Anders said, like it had been punched out of his gut.

It had to be Garrett. Anders remembered those eyes, the curve of that mouth that he'd pressed his own to all those years ago, when Anders was an entirely different person.

Garrett Hawke, though, had grown into quite a man, almost as tall as Anders, but broader. He carried Malcolm's staff over his back, and although it wasn't facing him, Anders would ever recognize that emblem of Andraste, all done up in bright gold and so conspicuously nude it kept you from asking about the staff itself.

Garrett looked equally gobsmacked, as he ought to. They were in *Kirkwall*, far from Lothering, although that part of Ferelden would have been hit by the blight. It was possible the Hawkes were just some of many refugees who came through.

"Anders?" Garrett said.

So Anders did look enough like his fifteen-year-old self to merit recognition. He let out a sharp laugh of disbelief.

The two men on either side of Garrett eyeballed him with some level of confusion. To the dwarf, Garrett said, "I knew him years ago, in Lothering," and to the man on his right, the one who was even taller and broader than Garrett, he said, "Carver, you remember Anders, he stayed with us for a few days."

That was *Carver*? Anders looked around as if he was going to spot the rest of the Hawke clan lurking somewhere around a corner.

"I don't remember every friend of yours," Carver grouched. "When was this?"

"Around a decade ago, I expect," Hawke said. His grin made creases in the corners of his eyes. "You're the Grey Warden they're sending us after? Maker, what a coincidence."

Anders was still stuck unable to say much aside from, "Garrett. *Fuck.*"

"I'm glad to see you," Garrett said.

In the same moment, Anders said, "I'm sorry."

"Don't be," Garrett said, with a little chuckle and a shake of his head. "Mother and Father explained to me why—I understood eventually. Why you left. I *did* cry for weeks, though, but I think that fact ought to just serve to flatter you."

"Oh, that's *him*?" Carver asked, bristling. He stepped forward, as if trying to interpose himself between Garrett and Anders.

"What'd Blondie do, break your heart?" asked the dwarf.

Garrett looked a little bit misty-eyed over that, even as guilt flooded Anders, tempered only a bit by the fact that Justice knew that particular memory of Anders' and had always approved of him sparing Garrett from the Circle. "A little bit," Garrett said. "I'm glad you finally got free, though."

"Yes—as you can see, I'm doing just wonderfully for myself," Anders joked. "Well. Better now you're here, I hope."

"We've got a lot to catch up on," Garrett said. "I don't suppose you're free for drinks right now?"

Given that they were in his clinic, which was currently operating, and Anders was already neglecting his duties just to talk to this group of newcomers, the answer was, "I'm not."

Garrett had the gall to keep that crestfallen sad-puppy look he'd had when he was fifteen.

"I can be later, though," Anders said. This evening, if you like. And if you're buying."

"That would be wonderful." Garrett put his hand over Anders' on his staff, sending a little pulse of magic through, a brief re-familiarization. Anders had come into close contact with many mages over the years, most notably and most recently the man he was currently trying to save from the Gallows (there was an idea—Garrett might be amenable to his cause) but Garrett's magic made him feel safe and relaxed in the way nobody else's did. His entire being warmed over.

Carver, in the background, was rolling his eyes. The dwarf was studying them as if he was watching the elaborate mating rituals of some rare species of Antivan parrot.

"This evening, then," Anders said.

"At the Hanged Man?" Garrett suggested.

"I suppose some fresh air would do me some good. Fresher. Relatively."

Garrett smiled, and Anders, who *literally had Karl waiting on his rescue the very next night*, was struck with an awful urge to kiss him. "I don't know if there's any of that in the Hanged Man, but I'll see you tonight."

He released Anders' hand and turned around, and Anders heard Carver say, "*you didn't even ask him about a single thing we came to ask him about,*" and Garrett respond, "*oh, be quiet.*"

And then, above all else, he felt a sentiment from Justice coming to the forefront of his mind, not terribly aggrieved, but resigned.

He is going to be a distraction, isn't he?

Author's Note:

Find me on tumblr, where I am shifting into Dragon Age mode, [@luddlestons](#), or on twitter [@luddlestons](#) where I talk about whatever I am into but usually stuff about the Bronze Age bc I'm writing a book

about some gay nonsense in the Trojan War and princes who fall in love with gods.